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Arms Dealer Gets No U.S. Protection

A New York arms dealer was sure he could count on U.S. intelligence agencies to protect him if he skirted the law to help them get some Soviet weapons they wanted for study. But when he was arrested for allegedly trying to sell rifles and ammunition to Poland as part of the scheme, his contacts hung him out to dry.

Solomon Schwartz, three other persons and HLB Security Electronics Ltd. were indicted for the attempted sale of 500 Ruger automatic rifles and 100,000 rounds of ammunition to Poland. Their defense is that the sale was a necessary element in the plan to obtain two Soviet T72 tanks and some SAM7 anti-aircraft missiles—and that the U.S. intelligence contacts knew it.

But in secret testimony submitted by federal prosecutors in New York, FBI and Defense Intelligence Agency officials say they never authorized Schwartz to do anything illegal, although they admit discussing with him the plan to get the Soviet weapons.

Our associate Donald Goldberg has learned that Schwartz, in a detailed affidavit, named the intelligence agents he met with and gave the dates and locations of the meetings.

Schwartz claims he was first approached by a "free-lance" Central Intelligence Agency operative in November 1982 and told about the agency's interest in the Soviet tanks. Schwartz traveled to Vienna and Warsaw and pursued the complex deal with Polish officials. The Poles said that U.S. arms would have to be part of the transaction, Schwartz said.

The arms dealer submitted a report on his trip to

a CIA official in the agency's New York office through an intermediary. The CIA later handed the case off to the DIA.

Schwartz's claim that he had several meetings with DIA officials is confirmed by closed-door testimony. One meeting took place near Washington and included two agency officials. One of the officials was James Hetrick.

According to the Schwartz affidavit, Hetrick was well aware of the arms-for-Poland deal and told Schwartz: "We take care of our own. We will never let you hang." But Hetrick has denied authorizing Schwartz to sell weapons to Poland.

Schwartz says he was given similar assurances of protection by Federal Bureau of Investigation counterintelligence agents in New York who wanted his help in tracking Polish spies in the United States. The agents have admitted meeting with Schwartz, but denied sanctioning illegal activity.

Schwartz swears he met with FBI agents at least five times, the first being on Aug. 23, 1983, at 26 Federal Plaza in New York City. There he was informed of the bureau's interest in information about Polish officials.

His final meeting with the FBI occurred at the Meadowlands, the sports complex across the river in New Jersey. It was then, Schwartz said, that he told the FBI that the Poles wanted U.S. weapons.

As it happened, it wasn't the Poles Schwartz had to worry about, but a government informer who was a rival of HLB Security Electronics. The informer got evidence of the Polish scheme, and Schwartz and his codefendants were indicted.